

PREMIER ANIMAL ATTRACTIONS

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Let me first begin by explaining our industry a bit. In order to do what many of us in this room do for a living, whether it be the dealing, breeding, or exhibiting of exotic animals here in Michigan, we all must first and foremost be licensed through the United States Department of Agriculture. USDA is the licensing, inspecting and enforcement agency and the agency in which sets all of the standards in regard to animal care, housing, husbandry, etc. by which we all must be in compliance with. That being said, Michigan zoos and exotic animal facilities have in recent years been divided into two groups really. These two groups are smaller non-accredited, privately owned facilities like ourselves and the other, are larger, public, accredited zoos like Detroit Zoo, Binder Park, John Ball Park Zoo, etc. These larger zoos, for their own reasons, have chosen to join the costly country club of zoos, called The Association of Zoos and Aquariums. While I personally have no problem with these zoos wanting to be recognized by organizations like AZA, this is not a mandatory protocol for exotic animal owners in MI. For this reason, I believe that these organizations like AZA and ZAA have no place in the laws for the state of MI.

Now, let me explain my concerns with House Bill 5163. While I have no problem with allowing USDA licensed facilities here in MI to participate in the breeding of their large carnivores, the language used and specific requirements to do so are very flawed. Although it may look as if USDA Class C exhibitors are included in this bill, the reality is that we are not included by that language used. Smaller privately owned facilities do not get the large corporate funding, government grants, etc. to be able to hire unnecessary scientists and or geneticists, in order to seek approval by the state for a "scientific-based breeding program" nor is it necessary. In addition, the statement about "not breeding large carnivores for the purpose of selling, bartering, leasing, or trading the animal or its offspring or animal parts for commercial profit" makes very little sense if any. We'd all be very naïve to think that these larger zoos will not use the loop hole of "donating" their offspring in exchange for offspring from another facility. This in fact is no different than bartering or trading. My biggest concern with this bill is that this is just another attempt by AZA accredited zoos to continue to monopolize our exotic animal industry here in MI. Our smaller facilities are just as,

if not more important when it comes to educating the public and our youth along with the conservation efforts of many various animal species. If House Bill 5163 does indeed pass legislation, this will set the precedent for further action by AZA zoos to eventually eradicate us smaller facilities period or strip our rights to the point of no return. What is next, limits on the breeding of non-human primates, small felines, small mammals, etc. and where will it end?

Here is my solution. It is simple. As I've said before, I don't believe that unnecessary accreditations have any place in our state law as it pertains to the Large Carnivore Act. We are USDA licensed and should therefore have the same rights as any zoo in Michigan, regardless of any additional organizations that one may belong to. I, along with many others, strongly oppose the passing of this bill unless the necessary changes are made to the language contained within. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns and I hope the committee will consider the interests of all licensees on this matter.